



IYCN USAID's Infant  
& Young Child  
Nutrition Project

# Understanding Challenges and Opportunities for Improved Maternal Nutrition

Data from Qualitative Reports from Nine IYCN  
Countries

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Photo: Aurelio Ayala III

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# Countries included in this review

- Côte d'Ivoire
  - Ethiopia
  - Ghana
  - Haiti
  - Kenya
  - Lesotho
  - Malawi
  - Nigeria
  - Zambia
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- Data from maternal nutrition review for Zambia. Data on maternal nutrition for other countries as a part of larger IYCN research.

Photo: Kali Erickson



# Reviewed research reports

Country	Literature review	Original research	Formative research
Côte d'Ivoire			X
Ethiopia	X		X
Ghana	X		X
Haiti		X	X
Kenya		X	X
Lesotho		X	X
Malawi	X		X
Nigeria			X
Zambia		X	X

# Why is the focus on women critical for infant and young child feeding?

The mother is the center for enhancing most nutrition activities:

- As caretaker
- As food provider
- As navigator of cultural information

# Programming realities

The mother is an important player, but generally her health is not the focus of infant and young child feeding behavior change activities.

*“There is completely nothing, there is no support in the community (for mothers) unless you talk to them about their children”*

*Clinician, Zambia*

# Perception that maternal nutrition/ health is related to infant and young child feeding

*“Mothers who are not well nourished cannot provide adequate breastmilk for their babies – in both the quality and the quantity of the milk.”*

*Community health worker, Haiti*

*“The mother’s own health and wellbeing are important in being able to properly care for her children”*

*Father’s focus group, Haiti*

*“If a woman is not eating enough so she cannot breastfeed exclusively for six months.”*

*Father, Ethiopia*

# Health staff engagement with women

- Marginal focus on maternal nutrition
- Health staff feel the need to convey too much information at a time

*“There is no support for pregnant women, only if you have HIV”  
Community health worker, Zambia*

*“Local women are not always interested in hearing us talk....they may be more interested in visual materials”*

*Health worker, Zambia*



Photo: Tina Koanga

# Health staff engagement with women

- Focused on technical information not counseling
- IYCN has made significant improvements to incorporate counseling training within its nutrition education



Photo: Tina Koanga

*“What is given in the clinic is the theoretical part, but there is a need for the practical part”*

*Community leader, Zambia*



# Household environment for women

- Grandmothers provide critical information on mother and child feeding and care
- They have a significant role as frontline caregivers and providers of nutritional advice



Photo: Judi Aubel

*Grandmothers were open to learning ‘modern’ information about health, nutrition and HIV”*

*Community health worker, Kenya*

# Household environment for women

- Fathers have a critical role to support their wives and children
- While not generally interested in 'women affairs' they expressed a desire to learn and be more active
- Nigeria recommended communications messages be given to different populations
  - Grandmothers
  - Mothers
  - Fathers
  - Health center personnel



Photo: Evelyn Hockstein

## Other household challenges

- Women's work load

*“We hardly have time to rest. Even now I am dozing. I wake up at 5am and my responsibilities are just too much, and most of the time, I have no one to assist me”*

*Mother, Kenya*



Photo: JHPIEGO

- Women's diets do not change significantly with pregnancy
- Poverty

*“These women are not able to sustain themselves due to lack of money even though they may have knowledge from us”*

*Community health worker, Zambia*

# Opportunities for change at the community level

- Health service providers should focus on counseling women with individual relevant information
- Integration of nutritional information
  - Family planning
  - Micro-business
  - Agriculture (home gardens)
- Need for follow up at the household



Photo: Evelyn Hockstein

# Opportunities for change at the household level

- Reduced work load
- Facilitate dietary adequacy (quantity and variety)
  - Home gardens
  - Increasing income
  - Reduce or eliminate foods from vendors
- Include key household members (grandmothers and husbands)
- Facilitate appropriate health seeking



Photo: Evelyn Hockstein

# Opportunities for change at the individual level

- Women's groups
- Health communications should be context specific and relevant
- Focus on empowerment (human agency)
- Examine and monitor change



Photo: Oluseyi Akintola